

Email August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009

I wanted to let you know that our doll making workshop became the highlight experience of summer camp -- the kids (ages 7-15) really amazed me with their creativity and passion as my originally scheduled 2 day workshop turned into a full week!

Some notes about the workshop that may be helpful to anyone else working with large groups of kids:

1) I opened the workshop using the DVD *Goodness and Happiness*. The documentary was filmed in PAL format (not used in the U.S.) and when we converted it to a format that was usable on television, we lost the sound. We used a PAL player that a friend had brought back from Europe, which worked perfectly. For anyone not on the PAL system, it may be helpful to know that the film plays just fine on most computers.

The film was a great introduction and sparked quite a bit of conversation among the kids. I followed it up with maps showing the countries of Africa, and with 2 exercises: 1 on poverty and 1 on skin colour that I adapted from the book *Earthsearch-A Kid's Geography Museum in a Book*.

For the first exercise, the kids pretended that they were not yet born, and they spun a wheel to learn whether they would live in a country that was wealthy or poor. They learned that statistically, it's much more common to be born into a developing country than one that has a fairly secure economic base.

The second exercise used a colour wheel made up of 3 sheets of transparent film. Each sheet had gradients of a colour: one red, one blue, and one yellow. When you arrange the sheets in a fashion, they create different variations of skin tones. This allowed the kids to begin speaking of their skin colour in different terms: "I am 40% blue, 30% red and 30% yellow" instead of "I am white", "I am brown", or "I am black". The fabrics we used for the bodies of the dolls covered a wide range of shades to re-enforce this.

I'm hoping to have the time to write up these exercises and make them available to educators. I'll send them along to you to use in any way that's helpful.

2) I had recruited a number of adults to help with the workshop. The only difficulty I had was with adult volunteers who were certain that boys would not want to make dolls, and if they did, they would only want to make boy dolls. The kids really challenged them--the boys were just as enthusiastic as the girls! I allowed every child to choose whatever gender they wanted to make and was thrilled to see a nice blend of male and female dolls made by both the same and opposite sexes. Hopefully the adults learned something!!

3) The clothing patterns provided in the Dollmaker's Workbook PDF file were a lifesaver! Even the youngest children had no problem choosing fabrics, folding them, and cutting out their own patterns.

As the workshop progressed, I allowed the older kids to work as helpers with the younger kids. This provided an added benefit of empowering the older campers and boosting their confidence levels.

4) The kids loved the Zulu names. We explained that the dolls would be distributed to children through caregivers and discussed whether or not to name the dolls. I let the kids come to their own conclusion that, if they were presented with a doll, they would want the opportunity to name it--not to have it arrive with a name already attached to it. So, instead, I let each child choose a Zulu name for themselves, and we used that name, along with their given name, throughout the workshop.

5) Finally--while the Uthando Project has written much about the importance of play in children and the wonderful impact providing these dolls can have on the lives of Zulu children, I learned about the powerful impact doll making workshops can have on the participants. I watched children go through amazing changes as they began to think about other people in the world outside their comfortable circle. They gave a lot of thought to how they would play and interact with the dolls, and designed them in a fashion that they, themselves would be delighted to play with. Most of the dolls ended up with a minimum of 1 additional outfit for a change of clothing, and many were accompanied by small toys, blankets and hand-stitched pillows.

6) When watching the film at the beginning of the workshop, the kids were unresponsive to the concept that the women were dancing and singing with their newly made dolls in South Africa. By the end of the workshop however, this scene was mentioned over and over again. Because of this, we decided to hold a small ceremony at the close of the workshop. Each child, using their Zulu name, presented their completed doll to the group. When all dolls had been presented, we did a short dance to African music, and then each child gave their doll a hug, and wished it a safe journey to its new owner. It really had a huge impact on the kids and was a great way to end the experience.

The dolls were placed on display for 2 weeks in the city building where they drew a great deal of attention before being packed for shipping.

A number of cast members from a local production of *The Lion King* came to see the dolls and loved the project (as many are from South Africa). Shipping costs for this workshop will be paid by the city, but it gave me the idea of approaching the production company to

help with shipping costs in the future. Our library district has also expressed interest in the project and would like to place dolls on display in library exhibit spaces before shipping them.

I want to thank you for all of your support. This has been a great experience and one I'll look forward to repeating as opportunities present themselves!

Here are some photos of the dolls.

Again,

Many thanks!

Julie

